

# Weekend

\*\*\*Friday, December 5, 1986

## MESSIAH

### Let the hallelujahs begin

By Richard Pontziou

EXAMINER MUSIC CRITIC

**L**UBE THOSE VOCAL cords, put air in those lungs — ladies and gentlemen, it's time to sing:

Ha... Hallelujah!

Ha... Hallelujah!

Hallelujah!

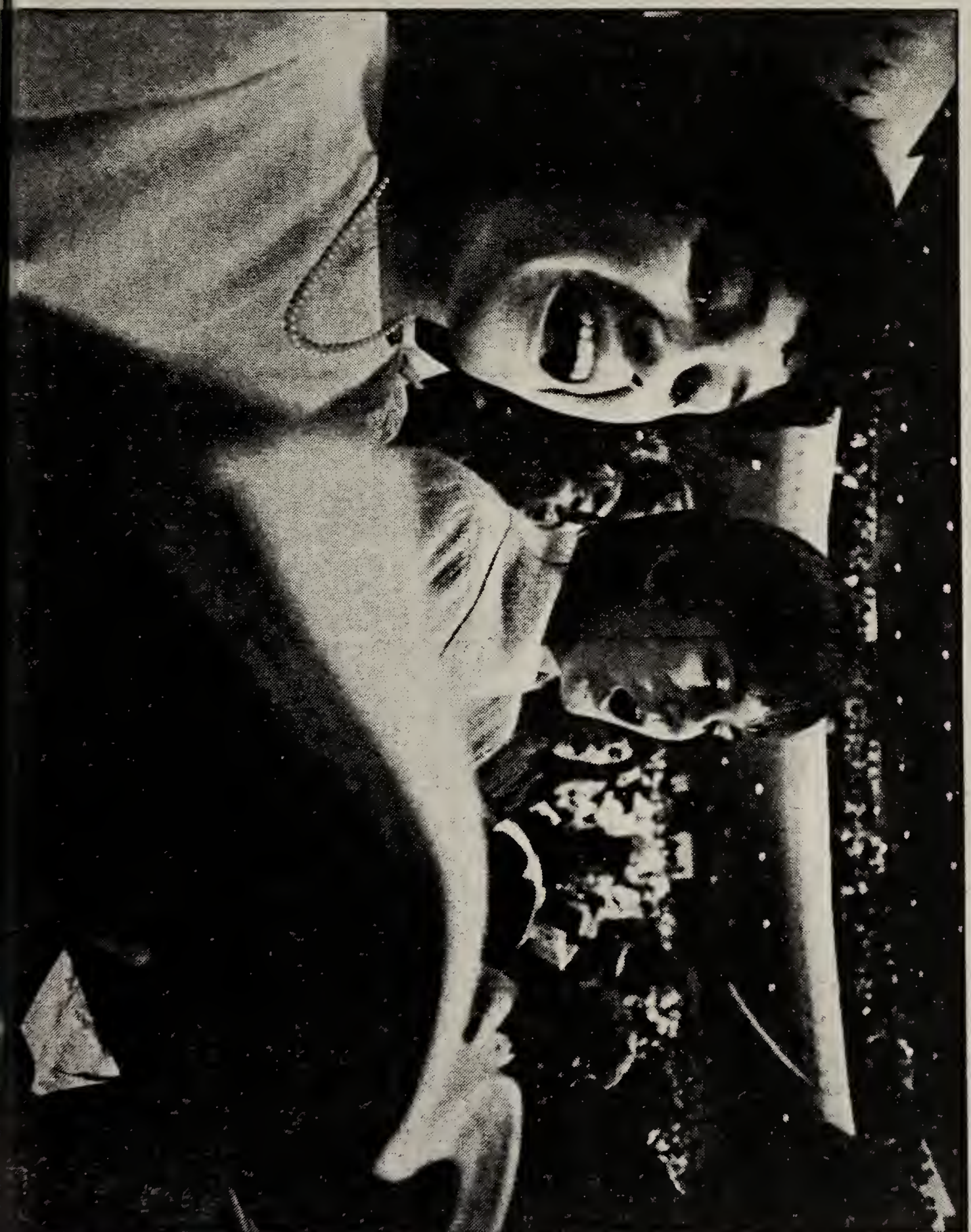
Hallelujah!

Halle... lujah!

And sing we will over the next three weeks — Christmas carols, hymns of praise and hope, songs of joy and some of the most enduring works of the classical music repertoire: Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Hodie," Benjamin Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols," Johann Sebastian Bach's "Christmas" Cantata, and the most popular of them all, George Frideric Handel's "Messiah."

Even as this story appears, "Messiah" sing-alongs have already begun in scattered regions of the Bay Area.

Starting Friday with a sing-along at UC-Berkeley, the performance frequency picks up in earnest. Through Christmas Day, Handel's score will be talked about in lecture halls, performed in churches and concert halls, broadcast on radio



few as 20 voices and as many as 3,000, with orchestras and without. It will be realized in period tradition, in Mozartean splendor and in all the trappings of 20th century performance practice.

Not bad for a work that was conceived at the lowest point in Handel's career, played to mixed reviews at its premiere and enjoys its popularity today "by some fluke," according to UC-Berkeley early-music scholar Philip Brett.

In 1986, we think of Handel's "Messiah" as we think of an old friend. We're comfortable with it. It fits. Some of it's hard to sing, but most of the choruses are manageable.

And then there's the message. It's in English, of course, with a text borrowed for the most part from the much-admired King James version of the Bible. A good third of the work is a setting of the Christmas story. The rest of it takes us through Christ's resurrection and affirmations of faith.

How we think of "Messiah" is not all that much different from how the British and the Irish thought of it in the 18th century.

Though it encountered some critical difficulties in 1742, it quickly took on a social/cultural role totally different from that of any other work in the classical repertoire.

Handel wrote it to satisfy a commission from Ireland's Duke of Devonshire and three of Dublin's large charitable organizations. His first performances benefited the inmates of several Irish jails.

That started a tradition, nur-



Louis Magor conducts the big daddy of local 'Messiah' sing-alongs, the San Francisco Conservatory bash, at Davies Hall Dec. 8-9 and at Marin Center Saturday

Examiner file photo

# Getting the most out of Handel's Christmas legacy

## Messiah

From D-1

tured by Handel in his own time, that continues to this day. Though it's seldom sung to benefit founding homes, as it was by Handel, is there a "Messiah" sing-along in the Bay Area that does not benefit one non-profit project or another?

UC-Berkeley's Sixth Annual "Messiah" Sing Friday at 7:30 p.m. in Hertz Hall supports the school's Young Musicians Program. The San Francisco Conservatory's "Sing-It-Yourself" program at Davies Symphony Hall Monday and Tuesday adds to the school's scholarship fund.

Handel would be very happy to see that his "Messiah" is being used in this fashion, says Brett, whose lecture on the musical life in Handel's London will open the Humanities West series "Path to Messiah" Friday at 8 p.m. in the Trustees Auditorium of the Asian Art Museum.

Though a difficult person who was "Very arrogant about his abilities," Handel was a deeply religious man "Very much interested in the causes of his time," Brett explains.

"I don't think he was religious in a way that we are led to believe that Bach was religious. Handel was much more of a humanist. His faith concentrated on the here and now, rather than the hereafter, which accounts for his tremendous charity."

Speculation has centered on the role that "Messiah" might have played in the development of Handel's faith and charity. It was written at the end of the worst time in the composer's professional life, when he was out of favor in England and struggling to keep his place in society.

Early in his career he had been a successful composer in his native Germany, traveling to Italy and winning a tremendous following there, he packed up Ireland, where he became a

naturalized citizen and anglicized his name.

London in 1710 was the financial and cultural center of the world, and going there to make one's fortune would have been the goal of any major artist.

"He was an enormous success in London, unavailable until about 1728," Brett recalls, "but then he was done in by factions within London society, factions that began to make things difficult for his opera ventures to pay off."

Handel fell ill in the late 1730s (Could it have been a nervous breakdown?) and left London to take the waters in Germany. It was upon his return to London that he wrote "Messiah." Suddenly, inexplicably, his fortunes turned around.

As Brett will observe in his lecture for Humanities West, some of the material for "Messiah" was borrowed by Handel from his own secular cantata works written when he was in Italy. Not unexpectedly, they have totally different meanings than those associated with certain sacred tunes today.

But therein, offers Brett, rests Handel's genius. "He was able to adapt a tune for the words he was setting, even when the new words had nothing to do with the old. He had a wonderful sense of color, a dramatic sense of matching words and music."

Mozart was fascinated by Handel's achievements in "Messiah" and other works, including the "Ode to St. Cecilia" and "Alexander's Feast," all of which influenced his sacred choral writing and portions of "The Magic Flute."

Mozart's fascination has rubbed off on us. In "Messiah," Handel speaks to us in ways that satisfy a multitude of religious, social and artistic needs. We can sing it ourselves, we can listen to it, or we can use it to enrich seasonal sacred services.

will appear this season in the Bay Area:

### HOW TO LEARN "MESSIAH"

Two Bay Area entrepreneurs are promoting different ways to learn the 20 choruses that wrap around "Messiah's" multitude of recitatives and arias.

Paul Dueweke, of Palo Alto, is selling a set of "Learn-It-Yourself" tapes that have the orchestra and full chorus singing on one stereo channel while the part to be learned is beautifully sung by a soloist on the second channel.

The two channels can be played simultaneously, the chorus and orchestra can be blocked out while you learn your own part, or the solo itself can be blocked out so you can test yourself against the full ensemble.

Dueweke's tapes are not as technically refined as they should be for their \$12 apiece price, but his idea is a good one. In just minutes, I had the alto line down pat for the chorus, "And the Glory of the Lord."

For tapes or further information, call Dueweke at 868-2636 or write him at 1646 Portola Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94308.

You can also learn your part by listening to Dr. Emily Hancock's "Messiah Tapes," but the teaching method is considerably more traditional and harder to follow.

Her "Messiah Classics" series is for choristers who can read music and follow along in their scores. In the tapes, the alto and soprano voice lines are played simultaneously on the piano. It's up to you to pick out which is yours. Another tape teaches the tenor and bass lines together.

Hancock's "Messiah Moog" is designed to teach the novice to learn his part by ear. Frankly, it confused me. Though I listened to it several times, I was never sure how it worked.

Hancock's tapes sell for \$10. You may call her at 840-0000.

### WHERE TO SING IT

East Bay residents can sing-along Friday at 7:30 in UC-Berkeley's Hertz Hall, where John McLean, director of the Young Musicians Program, will lead soloists from around the Bay and members of the university orchestra in UC's sixth annual Messiah Sing. A \$5 admission will benefit the Young Musicians Program, which helps prepare kids to enter colleges across the country.

The big daddy of "Messiah" sing-alongs is the San Francisco Conservatory's pair of programs in Davies Symphony Hall Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 8 and 9, at 8 p.m. Conductor Louis Magor, who has become something of a "Messiah" guru, will conduct the annual affair, which features the conservatory orchestra and soloists Claire Keim, Christine Abraham, Michael A. Contran, Bruce Ramaker (Dec. 8), and Mimi Ruiz, Karl Peters, Michael Matson and John deKrelia (Dec. 9). Proceeds benefit the Conservatory's scholarship fund.

Both Davies Hall concerts are sold out. This year, however, Magor and company will take their sing-along act to the Marin Center Saturday, Dec. 6, at 8 p.m. — and tickets are available. The \$20 admission charge will benefit the Marin Adult Day Health Center. For tickets, call 472-3500.

Down in the South Bay, the Schola Cantorum will offer its 20th annual Messiah Sing Monday, Dec. 8, at 7:30 p.m. in Cupertino's Flint Center. Royal Stanton will conduct. Tickets are \$8.

### WHERE TO HEAR IT

The only professional performances of "Messiah" locally will be staged by the San Francisco Symphony in Davies Symphony Hall Dec. 17-20 at 8 p.m. Celebrated Baroque specialist Nicholas McGegan will conduct. Soloists include:

This will be a periodic offering, promising to be first-rate in every regard. Ticket prices range from \$5-\$38.

### STUDYING "MESSIAH"

Humanities West has planned a weekend series of lectures, discussions and multi-media to set the stage for "Messiah" performances and answer questions about the London of Handel's day. Details follow regarding "Handel's London: Path to Messiah." All events will take place in the Trustees Auditorium at the Asian Art Museum.

Friday, 8-11 p.m.: Philip Brett speaks on "The Musical Life in Handel's London," while Li-Chan Chen and Susan Patterson, soprano, Elisabeth LeGuit, cello and Elaine Thornburgh, harpsichord, will sing secular duets composed by Handel and later used in "Messiah."

Saturday, Dec. 6, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.: Speakers include Thomas Laqueur on "Handel's London: The Full Tide of Human Experience," Louise Lippincott on "Sounds and Sights of London," Bruce Robertson on "Escaping the City: The Pastoral Retreat," and Vance George on "The Career of 'Messiah.'" Sally Scully will chair a panel discussion on "The Final Chorus."

Each lecture will be preceded by a five minute reading by Peter Donat from contemporary source materials coordinated with topics of discussion.

For ticket information call 387-8780.

### "MESSIAH" BROADCASTS

Bits and pieces of "Messiah" can be heard daily on radio and television. KQED-FM will broadcast the Conservatory's "Sing-It-Yourself Messiah" live on Dec. 9 at 8 p.m. KQED Television (Channel 9) will then broadcast it at 8:30 p.m. and Dec. 24 KKHJ Radio (1150 AM and 95.2 FM) will



L. Martell

San Mateo, CA.  
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# Symposium to celebrate Handel and his London

A celebration of Handel and his time opens Dec. 5 at the Trustees Auditorium, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, when Humanities West presents "Handel's London: Path to Messiah."

This two-day series of performances, lectures and discussions places the composer and his masterpiece in their context of 18th-century London, one of the great intellectual and artistic centers of Europe.

Lectures running the gamut from social to music history, performances of secular vocal duets, readings by actor Peter Donat, and a panel discussion highlight the symposium which runs Dec. 5 from 8 to 11 p.m. and Dec. 6 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Musicologist Philip Brett opens the program with a lecture on musical life in London, focusing on Handel's fluctuating fortunes as a theater composer as well as his private service to the monarchy and patron James Bridges.

The evening's program concludes with duets by sopranos Le-Chan Chen and Susan Patterson of the San Francisco Opera's Merola Program, cellist Elisabeth LeGuin and harpsichordist Elaine Thornburgh. A reception with the artists follows.

The Dec. 6 offerings include a

lecture by historian Thomas Laqueur on London's role as producer and consumer of leisure pursuits, and its effect on the political, economic and cultural life of England.

Curator Louise Lippincott of the J. Paul Getty Museum explores artistic controversies in "Sounds and Sights of London."

A discussion of English gardens and their role in the British psyche follows. "Escaping the City: The Pastoral Retreat" is delivered by Oberlin College's Dr. Bruce Robertson, who will illustrate his talk with examples of four country gardens of the period.

San Francisco Symphony Choral director Vance George examines "The Career of Messiah" in a survey of performance traditions and trends over two centuries, highlighted by recorded musical examples.

Saturday's program, which also includes readings by Donat, will end with a panel discussion, "The Final Chorus," and high tea.

The two-day series is moderated by San Francisco State historian Sally Scully.

It is presented by Humanities West in cooperation with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the San Francisco Sym-

phony, whose Dec. 17 performance of Handel's oratorio is included as a special event for symposium participants.

Registration fees for the complete series are \$50 plus \$25 for tickets to the Dec. 17 "Messiah." Tickets are \$20 for Friday only, \$45 for Saturday only.

Discounts are available for Friends of Humanities West, Museum Society members and students.





The San Francisco Conservatory's 'Messiah' sing-along this year will be Dec. 8-9 in the city, and Dec. 6 at Marin Center

# HANDEL: Christmas is his season

by Janos Gereben

correspondent

**D**NE day, apparently not too soon, the United States of America will discover two self-evident facts:

Handel wrote 19 oratorios besides "Messiah." (And 40 operas, mostly oratorios in costume.)

There is no divine or legal authority that "Messiah" may be performed only before Christmas.

In the past 244 years (since the oratorio's 1742 premiere in London), Europeans have prosaically upheld these tenets.

Else in the New World, however, have spent the past couple of Messiah-Mania decades defying them.

The result: very little Handel in American concert halls, and never a first-season "Messiah."

Anyway, here are some Messiah treatments for the holidays:

First, no "Messiah" proper, but plenty of first-rate music in a splendidly Victorian setting, at the Falkirk Cultural

p.m., Dec. 3. The Falkirk Mansion is located at 1408 Mission Ave. (at the corner of E Street) in San Rafael. Again, it's free.

■ UC-Berkeley's sixth annual "Messiah Sing" will be heard in Hertz Hall, under the direction of John McLean, at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 5. A \$5 donation is requested (\$3 for children); tickets are available at the door. The sponsor is the Department of Music's Young Musicians Program, 642-2686.

■ For the scholarly, Humanities West is presenting "Handel's London: Path to Messiah," an all-day symposium in the Asian Art Museum, Golden Gate Park, on Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 to 6 p.m. Lectures by historians and musicians will cover everything you ever wanted to know about "Messiah" and its composer. For information, call 387-8780, or check at the museum box office.

■ Doin' it yourself seems to be the new vogue, but forget about the big one in Davies Hall (Dec. 8 and 9) by the San Francisco Conservatory. For the eighth consecutive year, it sold out long

can hear — and sing — the very same "Sing-It-Yourself Messiah," with Louis Magor, the Conservatory Orchestra and soloists, at 8 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 6, in Marin Center. Tickets, at \$20 for the benefit of the Marin Adult Day Health Services, are available by calling 472-3500.

■ "Messiah" excerpts will be on the program of the Marin Symphony's holiday concert at St. Vincent's School for Boys on Dec. 7, at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sandor Salgo conducts the program entitled "An English Christmas," featuring music by Elgar, Britten, Vaughn Williams, and — match — Handel. Tickets, from \$10 to \$20, may be available by calling 479-8100 — but it looks like a full house for both performances.

■ KQED-FM will broadcast, live, the Dec. 9 S.F. Conservatory "Sing-It-Yourself 'Messiah'" from Davies Hall, beginning at 8 p.m.

■ Santa Rosa's entry will be heard at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 10.

takes place in the Luther Burbank Center. Tickets, at \$7.50 for the benefit of the Hospital Ministries of Sonoma County, are available by calling (707) 562-6200 or 542-0205.

■ Perhaps closest to the original, a very small "Messiah" will be presented by the Marin Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Norman Masonson at 3 p.m., Dec. 14, in the Point Reyes Dance Palace. This "Messiah Sing" provides an alternative to participating or just listening. Scores are available for rent. Tickets, at \$5 general or \$3 for students and seniors, are available by calling 258-9430 or 663-8399.

■ The biggest of them all, the San Francisco Symphony's first "Messiah" performances in Davies Symphony Hall, will take place at 8 p.m., Dec. 17-18. Nicholas McGegan, music director of the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, conducts Van der George's splendid chorus and soloists Julianne Baird, Derek Ragin, Grayson Hirst, and David Thomas. Tickets



# EMA NEWS

## *Handel's London:* Path to "Messiah"

### **Presented by Humanities West**

"London is a cold, dark, dirty place where there is nothing but money." So commented one 18th-century observer. Yet Dr. Johnson was moved to write that when one was tired of London, one was tired of life itself. This is the sort of vivid, paradoxical impression of 18th-century London which was conveyed to the nearly two hundred people who attended the Humanities West weekend in San Francisco on December 5 and 6, 1986. The program brought together scholars of history, art, and music, each bringing a different perspective to the subject.

The conference began with a lecture on "Musical Life in Handel's London" by Philip Brett of the music faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. Brett described the London musical scene as totally dominated by Italian *opera seria* in 1710 when Handel arrived. He then showed how Handel responded when that environment changed as the once aristocratic audiences became increasingly middle-class. Using slides and recorded musical examples, Brett traced Handel's work from *Rinaldo*, a typical *opera seria*, through *Acis and Galatea*, with its use of the English language and a chorus, to the oratorio *Athalia*, with its depiction of natural human emotions. *Messiah*, according to Brett, was a religious as well as a musical statement for Handel—an orthodox reaction to the deism which was becoming popular at the time.

Following Brett's lecture, the audience was treated to a short concert of Handel's works performed by harpsichordist Elaine Thornburgh, sopranos Li-Chan Chen and Susan Patterson, both of the San Francisco Opera, and cellist Elisabeth LeGuin. Featured on the program were two extensive vocal duets which Handel later reworked in *Messiah*. It was quite a surprise to hear the melody of

"For Unto Us a Child is Born" being sung with an Italian text which translates, "No, I will not put my trust in you, blind cupid!"

Four lectures were given on the second day of the conference, interspersed with another harpsichord performance by Elaine Thornburgh, with readings from the period on Handel's personality, and with works by actor Peter Donat of the American Conservatory Theater. Historian Thomas Laquer of the University of California provided a vivid picture of "Handel's London: The Full Tide of Human Experience," drawing on works of literature, art and historical documents. He described the unique position of London at the time—Europe's largest city, most of its inhabitants immigrants, a center of manufacture and free trade, and an "emporium of leisure." He also stressed that 18th-century London was one of the first places in which an artist could make a living by selling his wares, without having to rely on patronage. Handel's career reflected this milieu as he moved from producing Italian opera for the aristocracy to providing a cultural and religious experience for the English merchant class.

Louise Lippincott, Associate Curator of Painting at the J. Paul Getty Museum, picked up the same thread in her lecture, "Sounds and Sights of London." She highlighted the competition between imported "high art," represented by Handel, and home-grown English work by relating the story of artist William Hogarth's vendetta against Handel, accompanied by slides of Hogarth's prints and paintings. The appearance of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728 benefited Hogarth as much as it hurt Handel, since Hogarth made and sold no less than six paintings of one of its scenes. She pointed out that the statue of Handel as Apollo in Vauxhall Gardens (a public park) is evidence of his later acceptance by the English people.

In direct contrast to the bustle and filth of the London streets were the

English country gardens described by art historian Bruce Robertson of Oberlin College in his presentation, "Escaping the City: The Pastoral Retreat." Robertson showed that these gardens, conceived as narrative living works of art symbolic of the freedom enjoyed by the English landowners, employed asymmetrical designs which made use of the natural terrain, in direct contrast to artificial French gardens such as those at Versailles.

The final lecture of the program turned to *Messiah* itself as Vance George, director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, traced the history of *Messiah* performance through the years, from its Dublin premiere in 1742 to the present. Using recordings, some of them vintage, he presented examples of an early version of "Rejoice greatly" in 12/8 time, of the Mozart orchestration of 1789, of a Sir Thomas Beecham orchestration of 1927, as well as of more recent attempts at an "authentic" performance, noting that because *Messiah* has been performed regularly since its premiere, it has gone through many metamorphoses. The practice of performing it with massed choirs began as early as 1784 when 500 voices sang it at Westminster Abbey.

At "The Final Chorus," Sally Scully of the history department at San Francisco State University and moderator for the weekend, led a lively panel discussion with the four Saturday presenters. Active participation by the audience showed the enthusiasm aroused by the conference. Humanities West has presented five such encounters with "significant moments in cultural history" since its founding by Elaine Thornburgh in 1983. The next will be "Napoleon's Paris: Empire of the Arts" on April 10 and 11, 1987. The imagination and scholarship exhibited in these programs make Humanities West a significant part of the cultural life of the San Francisco area and a valuable model for such activities elsewhere.

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